

Department of State

§ 96.40

(d) The agency or person exempts newly hired and current employees from elements of the orientation and initial training required in paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section only where the employee has demonstrated experience with intercountry adoption and knowledge of the Convention and the IAA.

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE, FEE PRACTICES, AND QUALITY CONTROL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

§ 96.39 Information disclosure and quality control practices.

(a) The agency or person fully discloses in writing to the general public upon request and to prospective client(s) upon initial contact:

(1) Its adoption service policies and practices, including general eligibility criteria and fees;

(2) The supervised providers with whom the prospective client(s) can expect to work in the United States and in the child's country of origin and the usual costs associated with their services; and

(3) A sample written adoption services contract substantially like the one that the prospective client(s) will be expected to sign should they proceed.

(b) The agency or person discloses to client(s) and prospective client(s) that the following information is available upon request and makes such information available when requested:

(1) The number of its adoption placements per year for the prior three calendar years, and the number and percentage of those placements that remain intact, are disrupted, or have been dissolved as of the time the information is provided;

(2) The number of parents who apply to adopt on a yearly basis, based on data for the prior three calendar years; and

(3) The number of children eligible for adoption and awaiting an adoptive placement referral via the agency or person.

(c) The agency or person does not give preferential treatment to its board members, contributors, volunteers, employees, agents, consultants, or independent contractors with respect to

the placement of children for adoption and has a written policy to this effect.

(d) The agency or person requires a client to sign a waiver of liability as part of the adoption service contract only where that waiver complies with applicable State law. Any waiver required is limited and specific, based on risks that have been discussed and explained to the client in the adoption services contract.

(e) The agency or person cooperates with reviews, inspections, and audits by the accrediting entity or the Secretary.

(f) The agency or person uses the internet in the placement of individual children eligible for adoption only where:

(1) Such use is not prohibited by applicable State or Federal law or by the laws of the child's country of origin;

(2) Such use is subject to controls to avoid misuse and links to any sites that reflect practices that involve the sale, abduction, exploitation, or trafficking of children;

(3) Such use, if it includes photographs, is designed to identify children either who are currently waiting for adoption or who have already been adopted or placed for adoption (and who are clearly so identified); and

(4) Such use does not serve as a substitute for the direct provision of adoption services, including services to the child, the prospective adoptive parent(s), and/or the birth parent(s).

§ 96.40 Fee policies and procedures.

(a) The agency or person provides to all applicants, prior to application, a written schedule of expected total fees and estimated expenses and an explanation of the conditions under which fees or expenses may be charged, waived, reduced, or refunded and of when and how the fees and expenses must be paid.

(b) Before providing any adoption service to prospective adoptive parent(s), the agency or person itemizes and discloses in writing the following information for each separate category of fees and estimated expenses that the prospective adoptive parent(s) will be charged in connection with a Convention adoption:

(1) *Home study.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for home study preparation and approval, whether the home study is to be prepared directly by the agency or person itself, or prepared by a supervised provider, exempted provider, or approved person and approved as required under § 96.47;

(2) *Adoption expenses in the United States.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for all adoption services other than the home study that will be provided in the United States. This category includes, but is not limited to, personnel costs, administrative overhead, operational costs, training and education, communications and publications costs, and any other costs related to providing adoption services in the United States;

(3) *Foreign country program expenses.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for all adoption services that will be provided in the child's Convention country. This category includes, but is not limited to, costs for personnel, administrative overhead, training, education, legal services, and communications, and any other costs related to providing adoption services in the child's Convention country;

(4) *Care of the child.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses charged to prospective adoptive parent(s) for the care of the child in the country of origin prior to adoption, including, but not limited to, costs for food, clothing, shelter and medical care; foster care services; orphanage care; and any other services provided directly to the child;

(5) *Translation and document expenses.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for obtaining any necessary documents and for any translation of documents related to the adoption, along with information on whether the prospective adoptive parent(s) will be expected to pay such costs directly or to third parties, either in the United States or in the child's Convention country, or through the agency or person. This category includes, but is not limited to, costs for obtaining, translating, or copying records or documents required to complete the adoption, costs for the child's Convention court documents, passport, adoption certificate and other documents re-

lated to the adoption, and costs for notarizations and certifications;

(6) *Contributions.* Any fixed contribution amount or percentage that the prospective adoptive parent(s) will be expected or required to make to child protection or child welfare service programs in the child's Convention country or in the United States, along with an explanation of the intended use of the contribution and the manner in which the transaction will be recorded and accounted for; and

(7) *Post-placement and post-adoption reports.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for any post-placement or post-adoption reports that the agency or person or parent(s) must prepare in light of any requirements of the expected country of origin.

(c) If the following fees and estimated expenses were not disclosed as part of the categories identified in paragraph (b) of this section, the agency or person itemizes and discloses in writing any:

(1) *Third party fees.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for services that the prospective adoptive parent(s) will be responsible to pay directly to a third party. Such third party fees include, but are not limited to, fees to competent authorities for services rendered or Central Authority processing fees; and

(2) *Travel and accommodation expenses.* The expected total fees and estimated expenses for any travel, transportation, and accommodation services arranged by the agency or person for the prospective adoptive parent(s).

(d) The agency or person also specifies in its adoption services contract when and how funds advanced to cover fees or expenses will be refunded if adoption services are not provided.

(e) When the agency or person uses part of its fees to provide special services, such as cultural programs for adoptee(s), scholarships or other services, it discloses this policy to the prospective adoptive parent(s) in advance of providing any adoption services and gives the prospective adoptive parent(s) a general description of the programs supported by such funds.

(f) The agency or person has mechanisms in place for transferring funds to

Convention countries when the financial institutions of the Convention country so permit and for obtaining written receipts for such transfers, so that direct cash transactions by the prospective adoptive parent(s) to pay for adoption services provided in the Convention country are minimized or unnecessary.

(g) The agency or person does not customarily charge additional fees and expenses beyond those disclosed in the adoption services contract and has a written policy to this effect. In the event that unforeseen additional fees and expenses are incurred in the Convention country, the agency or person charges such additional fees and expenses only under the following conditions:

(1) It discloses the fees and expenses in writing to the prospective adoptive parent(s);

(2) It obtains the specific consent of the prospective adoptive parent(s) prior to expending any funds in excess of \$1000 for which the agency or person will hold the prospective adoptive parent(s) responsible or gives the prospective adoptive parent(s) the opportunity to waive the notice and consent requirement in advance. If the prospective adoptive parent(s) has the opportunity to waive the notice and consent requirement in advance, this policy is reflected in the written policies and procedures of the agency or person; and

(3) It provides written receipts to the prospective adoptive parent(s) for fees and expenses paid directly by the agency or person in the Convention country and retains copies of such receipts.

(h) The agency or person returns any funds to which the prospective adoptive parent(s) may be entitled within sixty days of the completion of the delivery of services.

RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS AND RECORDS AND REPORTS MANAGEMENT

§ 96.41 Procedures for responding to complaints and improving service delivery.

(a) The agency or person has written complaint policies and procedures that incorporate the standards in paragraphs (b) through (h) of this section and provides a copy of such policies and procedures, including contact in-

formation for the Complaint Registry, to client(s) at the time the adoption services contract is signed.

(b) The agency or person permits any birth parent, prospective adoptive parent or adoptive parent, or adoptee to lodge directly with the agency or person signed and dated complaints about any of the services or activities of the agency or person (including its use of supervised providers) that he or she believes raise an issue of compliance with the Convention, the IAA, or the regulations implementing the IAA, and advises such individuals of the additional procedures available to them if they are dissatisfied with the agency's or person's response to their complaint.

(c) The agency or person responds in writing to complaints received pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section within thirty days of receipt, and provides expedited review of such complaints that are time-sensitive or that involve allegations of fraud.

(d) The agency or person maintains a written record of each complaint received pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section and the steps taken to investigate and respond to it and makes this record available to the accrediting entity or the Secretary upon request.

(e) The agency or person does not take any action to discourage a client or prospective client from, or retaliate against a client or prospective client for: making a complaint; expressing a grievance; providing information in writing or interviews to an accrediting entity on the agency's or person's performance; or questioning the conduct of or expressing an opinion about the performance of an agency or person.

(f) The agency or person provides to the accrediting entity and the Secretary, on a semi-annual basis, a summary of all complaints received pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section during the preceding six months (including the number of complaints received and how each complaint was resolved) and an assessment of any discernible patterns in complaints received against the agency or person pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section, along with information about what systemic changes, if any, were made or are planned by the agency or person in response to such patterns.